



Beloved,

September 9, 2021

If it's good to be together, it must be bad to be apart.

And yet: the truth is that life has always been a rhythm of separation and togetherness, exile and return. We may prefer the "return" bit, the "bring you back to this place" bit, but that doesn't mean separation isn't part of this story.

Experiences of separation are at least as old as the ancient stories of the Garden of Eden, the Israelites' exile in Babylon, and the parable of the Prodigal Son. Jesus and his followers were separated by betrayal and death, and then reunited by forgiveness and newness of life. Even on our most "normal" days, our lives are a rhythm of gathering and dispersing, coming together and going apart, calls to worship and benedictions.

This past year has been another profound experience of this ancient pattern, and as challenging as it's been, we can take solace in the knowledge that our ancestors, too, experienced seasons of exile. And here's the point: thanks to this history, over time our faith – and our church – has been built to help us live through such seasons with grace and hope.

At our core, Oak Lawn UMC is a COMMUNITY of reunion, a COMMUNITY of homecoming, and a COMMUNITY of return. Now more than ever, in a world full of exile, our congregation stands as a beacon of hope, welcome, and radical hospitality that is *uncommon* in our world.

With all of this in mind, we invite you to join us throughout this season in giving thanks for all the resources – spiritual, theological, physical, and financial – that support this indispensable work. We give thanks for this COMMUNITY that extends its wholehearted support and welcome to migrants, unsheltered neighbors, LGBTQ+ persons, the deeply religious and the spiritual skeptic. And as we look ahead to 2022, enclosed you'll find our weekly Call to Worship. We invite you to pray this prayer daily over the next seven weeks. As you pray, begin reflecting on how you and your family are called to show up – spiritually, physically, and financially – in this **COMMUNITY to further cultivate generosity for an *uncommon* good.**

Blessings,

Lay Leadership of Oak Lawn United Methodist Church

Steve Franks, Alexis Reichman, March Maher, Ryan Wager, Deborah Austell, Bill Alston, Andy Jones, Kelsey Maxwell Acosta, Jim May, Ellie Lopez, & Gretchen Toler-Debus

*"Guard my common good: Do what's right and do it in the right way,
For salvation is just around the corner."
+ Isaiah 56:1*